

A strange sign in the Temple and its possible connection to the prosecution of James the brother of Yeshua

Scott Nelson 7/13

In the records of the historian Josephus is the account of several very strange and miraculous signs that occurred in the Temple and around Jerusalem in the years preceding the city's fall to the Romans in 70 A.D. All but one of these ominous signs are relatively easy to interpret. The one that is difficult to interpret took place in the Temple and is only briefly mentioned but is quite bizarre. It appears so far from reality that some scholars have discredited all the signs that Josephus mentioned as mere fables. My approach is actually the reverse of this. Because the others signs are so compelling in a number of ways, I can't help but believe there must be something of significance to this strange sign as well.

The picture of it was sitting on the shelf in the back of my mind for some time before it finally hit me. When I considered the identity of those who witnessed the sign with their own eyes, a new possibility or even probability emerged. All of these eye witnesses, as well as many of their associates, were familiar with a very unjust trial that took place a mere four years earlier. A number of them were undoubtedly a part of it. The significance of the person involved to whom the injustice was done can not be understated. It was none other than James the brother of Yeshua. I now believe this particular sign was addressed specifically to those priests who had innocent blood on their hands. The most notable of them was Ananus. He was the High Priest and head of the Sanhedrin who ordered the death of James. He was deposed of his High Priestly position because he had James' blood on his hands, but four years later, at the time of the sign that appeared in the temple, he was commander of the revolutionary forces in Jerusalem. He would have without question been very tight with the sitting High Priest and very close to all the happenings in the Temple. He most certainly would have heard about it immediately from first hand witnesses, but he also might well have been in the Temple to witness the sign with his own eyes. It certainly would have been poetic if he had been.

There were undoubtedly a number of issues that were brought before James at his trial four years earlier, and there are a number of issues which would be safe to assume were discussed. But there is one issue that most certainly would have come up, and anyone familiar with the facts could easily imagine how the discussion of this issue would have naturally played out. It is the issue of James' physical relationship to Yeshua.

Below is offered a version of how I think the line of questions and answers concerning James' physical relationship to Yeshua might well have gone. It is also fairly safe to assume that the subject matter of Paul and the Gentile who defiled the Temple a few years before James' trial would also have been brought up. I have written a separate article concerning this issue, entitled; "***Why Didn't James Come to Paul's Rescue?***" It can be accessed at http://www.judaismvschristianity.com/trophimus_incident.htm .

In the following theoretical reenactments, I have also included my idea of how the issue of Paul might well have been discussed at James' trial.

The Trial

High Priest Ananus: “James, you have been brought here before the Sanhedrin on charges of sedition and being a leader of this Messianic movement that believes your brother Yeshua is somehow Israel’s Messiah. Is it true that you are their leader and that you are Yeshua’s brother?”

James: “Yeshua is indeed my older brother, and I have become a leader to those who know him as Israel’s Messiah. Often I am asked what it was like for me to have grown up with Yeshua, and many have come to trust me to tell the truth about him.”

Ananus: “As you well know, the Sanhedrin does not believe Yeshua, who by the way is dead, could possibly be Israel’s Messiah. We have heard that you and your followers believe the ridiculous story that he was raised from the dead and is alive. But we have never seen him and so our position remains. You are also aware that these Messianics who follow your lead have been a burdensome problem for us. We have heard that they blame the Sanhedrin for your brother’s death and therefore have no respect for our rulings or authority any longer. Furthermore, this Messianic movement has gone to the Gentiles where they are now calling themselves Christians ...and everyone in Jerusalem still remembers the day several years ago when one of them, the Ephesian, Trophimus by name, thought the Law of Moses didn’t apply to him and he defiled the Temple of God by entering the court of Israel where no uncircumcised Gentile is permitted to go. To this day there remains a dark cloud of depression over Jews everywhere because of that desecration. It was a Messianic associate of yours who had the gal to teach both Jews and Gentiles that Moses had somehow been annulled. Everyone remembers Paul ...who is now being harbored by the Romans and out of our reach. He taught that your brother’s crucifixion is what somehow annulled the Law of Moses. Consequently, Gentiles like Trophimus, actually believed they now had some new right to enter the Temple. I know that it was Paul’s teaching that was responsible for the outrage because I was one of those who interrogated Trophimus. His friend Paul was his first and only defense. He claimed that Paul had taught that Gentiles were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the Jews and members of the household of God.¹ We have also heard that it was you who had sent that blasphemer to the Temple at the same time Trophimus defiled it. Our question to you is; Did you have any part in this abomination, and do you accept any responsibility for it seeing you and Paul were also close?”

James: “I too had heard the rumors of what Paul had been teaching the Gentiles and was terribly disturbed by it. When Paul came to Jerusalem, the first thing I did was confront him about the rumors and I let him know in no uncertain terms that they had better not be true.² At that time, because he was a fellow believer in Yeshua, I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. The very reason I sent him to the Temple was to offer him an opportunity to prove to all that the rumors were only rumors and he still abided by the Law of Moses. I ordered him to actually provide the animals of sacrifice for four Nazirites who had taken a vow. I thought that if he truly believed the Law of Moses had been annulled, he would never involve himself with burnt offerings and the sacrificial rites of the Temple. The fact that Paul went ahead and provided the animals for sacrifice had convinced me for a short time that the rumors were not true. When we heard about Trophimus defiling the Temple and the subsequent defense he had given you, we were shocked. It was then that we realized the rumors *were* true and Paul had deceived us. I was also given a copy of Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Gentiles and was absolutely appalled by what I

¹ See Ephesians 2:14-19

² See Acts 21:18-36

read. It's no wonder Trophimus thought he had the right to go into the Temple. Paul had deceived me. He was a coward for not telling me the truth and standing behind what he had been teaching. The very fact that he is now safe in Rome with his fellow Roman citizens openly displays the depths of his cowardice. After boasting that he was willing to come to Jerusalem and die for what he believed,³ as you know—because this very body petitioned Festus to have Paul brought before it—when Festus offered Paul the opportunity to come here and defend himself, he cowered and chose rather to make his appeal ...to of all people ...Caesar Nero!⁴ To this day, the thought of Paul and what he has done feels like a knife in my stomach. From the moment I knew the rumors about what Paul had been teaching were true I have had nothing to do with him. And frankly, I was not unsympathetic to the cause of those who took an oath and refused to eat until they saw Paul dead.⁵ As you know, I have always been zealous for the Law of Moses and the sanctity of the Temple, and I have always taught the Messianics likewise.”

Ananus: “These Messianics are nevertheless becoming an ever increasing problem. So James, tell us more about your brother Yeshua. What is the deal with him? We hear you have referred to him as Adoni ...your Master! Isn't it a bit unusual for someone to refer to his brother that way? What's so great about him? You both came from the same parents. Why aren't you as special? Don't you feel any of the more typical jealousy that a brother might feel in a situation like yours?”

James: “Yeshua and I do not have the same parents. We are half brothers.”

Ananus: “Is that right? So, do you and Yeshua have a common father? If so, what is his name?”

James: “Yeshua and I do not have the same father. We have the same mother. Yeshua was born before *our* mother came to be with *my* father Joseph.”

Ananus: “So who was Yeshua's father, and when did he die so that your mother later married your father Joseph?”

James: “Our mother was pregnant with my brother when she married my father Joseph.”

Ananus: “It would appear the truth you are trying so hard to avoid saying is that your common mother was a harlot! Is that right James?”

The pain those awful words brought to James' heart cut like a knife ...so much worse than the knife he felt in his stomach over Paul that he instantly forgot about him. This pain went right to his very soul. You see, there had been a time when he wondered about his mother himself. He remembered it well and hated himself for ever having questioned her honor. As his life was passing before his eyes he remembered the day when as a young boy he was sitting on the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee and his mother sat down next to him and asked him what was troubling him. It was like she could see right through him ...almost as if she already knew what was on his mind. He remembered telling her he had heard people say some really nasty things about her and how he had figured out the math didn't work when it came to when his older brother was born and when she and his father had gotten married. He told her he knew there was something different about his older brother, but wasn't sure just what it was. He remembered

³ See Acts 21:13

⁴ See Acts 25:9-12

⁵ See Acts 23:12-15

summoning the courage to ask her outright if it was because his father Joseph wasn't really Yeshua's father. He could still see the pain in her eyes from hearing him ask the question. At the time, he thought the painful look was born of guilt. But he had long since come to know differently. The pain in her eyes was for him and what she knew he was going to have to bear. He could hear her tender voice yet echoing in his memory:

"James. I knew this day would come when you would ask me that question. I didn't expect it this soon ...but it is here now." She paused, took a deep breath and said; "My son, I love you more than life itself. I hope you know that. What I am about to tell you is going to be very hard for you to believe ...and though I know you may not believe me, it's time for you to know the truth about your brother."

She went on and told him about being visited by the angel Gabriel and what he had told her about the child that would be conceived in her womb. He shamefully remembered having thought to himself: "The same angel who visited the great prophet Daniel ...visited my mother?! Yeah right." She told him everything ...about how she and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem for the census, about staying in the stable the night his brother was born, about what the shepherds had heard ...everything!

He remembered later how as a young man he had confided in his Rabbi what his mother had told him, and how his Rabbi had as nicely as he could, told him that sometimes people make up grand stories to hide dark secrets of the past. He remembered when his brother had begun his ministry and how many people followed him. He remembered how all the while he thought in the back of his mind that his brother couldn't be for real because he was an illegitimate product of fornication. He remembered how hard it was for so long, to look his mother in the eye without feeling shame for her. He remembered how when his brother was crucified he entrusted the care of his mother to one of his followers instead of him and how it hurt. And he remembered watching him die. All these things he remembered with shame. Then he remembered the day he was with his mother and a group of his brother's disciples when Yeshua suddenly appeared to all of them. He remembered looking into his mother's eyes as he realized everything she had told him was the truth. No words were spoken between them. None needed to be spoken. There were only tears. For the first time since he was a little boy he could look into his mother's eyes, and the shame he now felt was his own.

He remembered how over the years since his brother's resurrection he had done everything in his power to make it right with his mother and brother by telling everyone the truth about his brother. He remembered telling many others exactly what his mother had told him about his brother's conception, and how he hated himself for ever having doubted his mother and thinking the things he had about her. And now, Ananus had just called his mother a harlot. He knew he had to tell the truth, and he knew exactly how it would be received.

James: "Our mother was far from being a harlot. She was a virgin when my brother was conceived in her."

Ananus: "What did you say? I hope you fully understand the seriousness of testifying before this body. You'd be well advised to think long and hard about the claims you intend to make here. So let me ask you again: Who was Yeshua's father?"

James: “Yeshua is not of this world. He is the son of God Himself. Our mother was a virgin when she conceived my brother by the Holy Spirit.”

Ananus: “This is blasphemy! You all heard it for yourselves! This man claims Yeshua was the son of God and that his mother got pregnant as a virgin! What a convenient story! Is it not obvious that this story was concocted to defend the honor of a common mother who was a harlot? It would actually be touching that her sons go to such ridiculous extremes and make up such a story to defend her if it weren't for the fact that this ridiculous story has caused the deception of so many thousands of Jews who now actually think a dead man is Israel's Messiah! I ask; who anywhere has ever heard of a virgin becoming pregnant? Not just in men ...but in *all* of nature, what creature has ever gotten pregnant by itself? Such a thing has never been heard of! Never has any creature become pregnant without its kind having planted its seed in its kind's womb. And as absurd as it is to think that any creature can become pregnant as by itself, James here seriously wants us to believe one can be impregnated by something not of its own kind! Seriously James, ...God impregnating a human? Who, anywhere, in all of history has ever heard of a camel giving birth to a donkey or a goat giving birth to a bird? Come on, a human giving birth to a son of God? You are asking us to believe something as absurd as a heifer, never having been near a bull, suddenly giving birth to a lamb? Tell us James. Do you seriously think something like that could ever happen in a million years?”

James: “Yes, Ananus. I could. If the Creator of Heaven and earth, the God of Israel wanted it to be so, it would be.”

Ananus: “Seriously James! What fantastic claim couldn't you hide behind that kind of logic? Listen to yourself. ...a heifer giving birth to a lamb?! You are mad James ...you have gone stark raving mad. As touching as it is that you would go to such lengths to defend your mother's honor, the fact is you have deceived countless numbers of your brethren with your wild stories, and now they all want to fault God's priesthood for your brother's death and have turned against us altogether! What are we supposed to do ...just let a mad-man lead an insurrection against God's priesthood? The Law says that such a person should die, and that is my recommendation to this Sanhedrin. James should die for his treachery against God and His priesthood. Let us be done with the both of these brothers and the damage they have caused forever.”

James is then taken out of the city and stoned to death. Ananus now has blood on his hands and is deposed of his position as High Priest.

Four years later Ananus regains power as revolutionary commander of the rebel forces in Jerusalem and is very close to the sitting High Priest and the proceedings in the Temple. That next Passover, as the High Priest was leading a heifer to be slaughtered for sacrifice, the animal lets out a moan and lies down.

Here is how the story might well have unfolded from this point.

High Priest: “Oh what now?”

Accompanying priests: “Apparently Bessy here knows what's in store for her and she doesn't want to go!” *Laughter*

High Priest: “Very funny. Now don’t just stand there like bunch of idiots. Help me get her back up.”

Accompanying priests: “Uh ...High Priest?”

High Priest: “What?”

Accompanying priests: “Uh... we have a problem here. Bessy is about to give birth!”

High Priest: “What! That’s not possible! You know the lengths to which we go to make sure none of the sacrificial heifers ever come near a bull! We all know the abomination it would be to sacrifice a pregnant cow! How is this possible? Who is responsible for letting a bull get near this heifer?”

Accompanying priests: “Uh... no one sir! Every precaution has been taken as always.”

High Priest: “What do we do now?”

Accompanying priest: “I just saw Ananus heading toward the treasury. As a former High Priest, maybe he has some advice. Someone go get him.”

A few minutes later...

Ananus: “What seems to be the problem here?”

High Priest: “Our heifer here is about to give birth!”

Ananus: “What! How can this be?”

High Priest: “That’s what *I* said!”

Ananus: “Thank God it happened here and you didn’t find out when you slaughtered her! How can she be pregnant? Who is responsible for this? Why wasn’t she kept away from bulls?”

High Priest: “I have been assured... all the precautions have been taken as usual and she has not been near any bulls!”

Ananus: “Good God man! You think I’m some kind of fool? Heifers don’t get pregnant by themselves! You are beginning to sound like that fool James we did away with several years ago!”

Now imagine the fear that Ananus and the priests experienced as they witness the heifer give birth to a lamb!

The Sign

“At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.”

-Josephus, Wars Book VI Part 3